

Then shall your light  
break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall  
spring up speedily

-Isaiah 58:8



# Episcopal Schools Celebration 2021

## *NAES Executive Director's Message*



**“Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up speedily.” (Isaiah 58:8)**

*The Rev. Daniel R. Heischman, D.D., Executive Director*

Only a matter of weeks ago, things felt brighter in our country. We thought we had passed the worst of the pandemic, and there was a spirit of return—be it a return to what we have known as normal, a return to what had seemed familiar but suspended for some sixteen months, or the much-anticipated return to the things we love to do in life. The light that Isaiah proclaimed as dawning (Isa. 58:8a) felt akin to our collective mood—summer had arrived and we were back!

Then all too quickly, the mood, as well as the course of the pandemic, turned around. Return was now about the wearing of masks once again, the hesitancy to be in groups, the concern over whether or not to shelve the plans we had made for opportunities to travel, connect with loved ones, and experience a sense of freedom. New divisions emerged over vaccinations and various protective measures, and there surfaced a palpable sense of frustration—here we go again!

In such conditions, how do we now look at Isaiah’s proclamation that the light is breaking forth? What does light now mean to us?

To be sure, there is plenty about which to be hopeful. We continue to make progress even in the midst of shifting plans and increased uneasiness and division. We have learned so much through these months and those learnings equip us better to meet the moment. What’s more, hope is far stronger than just feeling optimistic or a reflection of mood, and while it may not feel that healing will necessarily spring up speedily, as Isaiah proclaims (Isa. 58:8b), we remain committed to the current and future work of healing that all of us, including all of us in Episcopal schools, must do.

As light always does, however, we are now seeing things in from a different perspective, in a different light.

Light shines, but light also exposes. In the letter to the Ephesians, we are told that part of walking as children of light is to expose the works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). We must face up, in other words, to the inequities and shortcomings that the light of this pandemic has brought to the surface. Episcopal schools, in what we teach, how we teach, and the ways we treat each other, are committed to an honest confrontation with the truth. Rather than sidestep the ways in which we have fallen short as individuals and communities, we take the path of a compassionate confrontation with the truth.

What we then do with that truth is important, indeed can distinguish us. Ephesians tells us that anything that is exposed by the light, anything that becomes visible, turns out to be light (Eph. 5:13). We deal honestly with the truth not just to criticize or divide, we use it for the work of redemption. Anything, *anything*, exposed to the light is capable of redemption—our histories, our actions, our relationships, our divisions in the midst of a community. In the light of day, even the darkness contains the promise of hope.

Light also does something else, even in these discouraging times. It offers the hope of uniting. The light we have seen in these pandemic times, if we dare call it that, has been the degree to which our lives are far more intertwined than we might have thought or wished to believe. We wear masks not just to protect ourselves, but to keep others healthy. The virus knows no borders, so it is impossible to isolate ourselves from the rest of the world—until the world is vaccinated, the virus will not be contained. Our actions cannot be separated for the welfare of the larger community and the fulfillment of the common good.

In Episcopal schools, our regular gathering for worship is a poignant symbol of that interconnection. Chapel reminds us, as St. Paul put it, that we are members of one another and thus bear one another's burdens. It is the launching pad for service, for the building of character, and the foundation for the compassion we need in our life together. Thanks to our chapels, it is hard to be in an Episcopal school and miss that community connection.

This means, as Isaiah reminds us, that the hungry are linked to those who are full, the afflicted and the healthy are bound together, those who are free and those who are oppressed are sharing the same common space. By virtue of the light that has dawned, we see that, and through what the light has revealed, we can proceed to be the repairers of the breach (Isa. 58:12a), a light for the world (Matt. 5:14), even in these turnaround, discouraging times.